



Swedish Work Culture ENG



Things to know when you are at work in Sweden

Apart from weekends, holidays and sick leave days, Swedes go to work. If they like it or not. If you go to a Swedish work place, you might find out that things "work" a bit different than in your own country. Here are a couple of things to remember, in case you ever fancy working in a Swedish company or in Sweden:

1. Enjoy flat hierarchies

When you hand in your CV to apply for a job, don't waste time on collecting and attaching old documents. A few phone numbers to previous employers are enough. Your new boss or human resource personell will probably rather put more emphasis on what people have to say about how you work than what grade you have on your school graduation certificate.

2. Dress casually at work

Preferably not if you're a banker, nurse or soldier. But otherwise, feel free to put on your favorite shirt/dress and pair of dark jeans.

3. Be punctual

That means, make sure you come punctually to work, and leave work punctually, too. The only time Swedes accept a wait is for dental or medical appointments. When you have an appointment for a meeting at work at 10.00. Be there rather a few minutes before than only one minute too late. If you happen to come too late, the whole group will punish you with very subtle looks, telling you you messed up.

4. Work overtime, but only if absolutely necessary

Most bosses won't expect you to work overtime. Overtime is uncommon among most office jobs, unless a big project is on the table, of course. But otherwise, work exactly those hours you're supposed to. Working extra very often, to impress your boss, will only tell him or her that you can't manage your work load very well, it also increases the risk for the company that you could burn out, have more days of sick leave and feel overall less satisfied with your current work place. Most Swedish work places want you to feel good and not squeeze that last drop of working power out of you.

5. Work hard, but try to *stressa inte för mycket*, don't stress too much

Since Swedes are conscious about others (and their own) well-being, they are good at keeping an eye on whether their colleagues are stressing out too much or have at least as much to do as themselves. If you discover some incorrect behavior among your colleagues, make sure to report it to your closest workplace friend to *skvallra om det*, gossip about it. But definitely not to your boss (who actually would be able to improve the situation). You don't want a conflict, do you?

6. It's unusual to blend colleagues with "private" friends

Yes, you might go for an afterwork with your colleagues some day. But the atmosphere probably will be far less relaxed than with your personal

friends. Many Swedes draw a distinct line between work- and private life. It's rather uncommon that Swedes want to blend good old friends from school or university with their new colleagues from the marketing department. The first time your working colleagues meet your friends will probably be on your wedding (or funeral).

7. Start thinking in week-numbers when you make appointments

When you make an appointment in, say, a couple of months get used to saying the week number first.*Niklas: Nästa möte... vad sägs om vecka 35?* Next meeting... what about week 35?

Louise: Tyvärr, då är jag på Kreta med min sambo. Men vecka 37 skulle passar utmärkt. Unfortunately, I'll be on Crete then. But week 37 would fit perfectly.

8. Address your boss with his or her first name

Use *du* (you) with everyone in Sweden, except the members of the Swedish royal family.

So, dear soon to be Swede, hand in your CV to a Swedish company and get used to greet your boss with "God morgon, Bengt!" (Good morning, Bengt!) or "Hej Ann-Marie" (Hello, Ann-Marie!) when you enter the office, while wearing a polo shirt or pullover.

9. Avoid making appointments in



July

Since Swedish winters are long and dark, Swedes try to make the best out of every day in summer. Therefore Swedish society collectively decided to go on vacation basically during whole July. More about why Swedes don't work in July.

10. Take *fika* seriously

Swedes are inflexible with the timing of *fika* (coffee break). So don't disturb their coffee routines. It's not just drinking coffee, it's an integral

part of Swedish lifestyle and Swedes consider it important for bonding with their colleagues.



Things you must check, when you work in Sweden

1. a-kassa

abbreviation for unemployment fund, i.e. money you get if you are unemployed. Please note that you do not receive unemployment insurance automatically, but you must register and pay a monthly fee. You can also supplement the unemployment insurance fund with income insurance. It is the trade unions that take care of both unemployment insurance and income insurance, and you should register as soon as you have a job.

2. decision making

Swedish decision-making processes are notorious for being slow, perhaps because everyone has to have their say and the process is not considered complete until everyone is relatively satisfied and has the feeling that they have made their voices heard. The decision-making process usually requires several meetings, and it is not unusual to feel frustrated or experience a lack of direction in the discussions.

3. manager

Don't expect to get promoted just because you are good at your job. Managerial positions tend to be filled with a focus

on leadership qualities rather than detail-level professional expertise. Being a good leader according to the Swedish model does not mean that you direct and dictate, but instead coach your employees to make the right decisions themselves. Those with managerial aspirations can go a long way by remembering co-workers' birthdays, organizing coffee for the office, and convincing people that it was them and not you who came up with that great idea that you actually had yourself. Namely, this is something that will make the management open their eyes to you as manager material.

In daily work, every employee is expected to be responsible for their tasks, even those who have recently graduated or are new to the workplace. If, for example, you need to come in later one morning, you usually don't need to ask for permission, but instead communicate this to everyone involved in good time. It's even the case that your boss will think you're annoying if you keep asking what and how to do it. Overly obedient employees are not highly valued by Swedish managers.

4. feedback and criticism

Many Swedes find it difficult to both express and receive feedback and criticism. Many people born abroad thus report that they receive no feedback at all at work, or that the feedback they receive is indirect and difficult to interpret. A common format is a so-called double sandwich, that is, negative feedback is presented between two layers of positive feedback.

5. These abbreviations

AB. aktiebolag

bl.a. bland annat

d.v.s. det vill säga

f.d. före detta

fr.o.m från och med

m.a.o. med andra ord
m.m. med meram.
fl. med flera
m.v.h med vänliga hälsningar
obs! observera
o.s.v. och så vidare
p.g.a. på grund av
s.k. så kallad
t.ex. till exempel
t.o.m. till och med
ung. ungefär
VAB vård av barn
vd verkställande direktör

6. gemenskap

... is important for Swedes. This means that you feel a sense of belonging with the group, perhaps not because you think and think alike, but because you have similar experiences and references.

In a workplace, most Swedes care a lot about the community, which can be expressed in the fact that they avoid taboo subjects, that they have certain rituals around small talk and that everyone, according to unwritten rules, must join for coffee or lunch together.

7. initiative

Most Swedish organizations have a relatively flat structure and the manager does not get involved in what the employees are doing. This is an environment where you are expected to take your own initiative and direct your own work. If you are used to working in more hierarchical structures, it may take time to get used to it. Make sure your role, duties and responsibilities are clearly agreed between you and your employer, and don't be afraid to tackle things without being told.

8. career change

For Swedes, there is nothing strange about changing careers late in life, and you are entitled to a full student loan even when you are 47 years old. From the age of 47, the number of weeks you can take out a student loan decreases, while the student grant is the same up to the age of 56, when you no longer have the right to study funds. It is common to change industries and what is generally considered to be competence in a certain professional field can be useful in another. Those who change careers late in life are usually congratulated, as it is considered to mean that they have finally found the right one.

9. collective agreement

Many employers (but not all!) have an agreement with a trade union where you can read the conditions that apply to employment in the company. This collective agreement overrides general legislation as long as it is more generous to the employee. For example, according to Swedish law, you are entitled to 25 days of paid holiday every year, but the collective agreement may say 30 days. In that case, 30 days apply.

In the collective agreement, you can read about the rights and obligations of both employers and employees, including salary levels and which budget applies to salary increases. The personal employment agreement is therefore relatively brief, as it refers to the collective agreement. You do not have to be part of a union for the union's collective agreement to apply. In short, your collective agreement is an important document where you can find the information you are looking for about your employment.

10. salary increase

The only way you can increase your salary properly is to change jobs. Due to the system of collective agreements there is a clearly set collective budget for salary increases. This budget is negotiated by employers and unions once a year. The budget specifies how

much the salary increase for the entire company may cost and within which intervals each employee can receive a raise. In a year when you have performed well, you can rarely count on more than a three or four percent increase, and usually it is lower than that.

